PRESIDENT JAMES I. ARMSTRONG'S REMARKS

At Meeting of College Community

May 7, 1970

Thank you for responding to my call for a college-wide meeting. In the spirit of the last two days this seems to me the right and necessary way--that we come together--students, faculty, staff--all of us who have a primary stake in Middlebury College.

This is a College meeting to place before the community certain alternatives; it is not an open forum. I plan to speak. I have asked two students to speak and I have asked a member of the faculty to speak.

There will be a special meeting of the College Council at 1:00 p.m. today to consider the alternatives before us and to make a recommendation.

At the memorial service on Tuesday evening I spoke of the vulnerability of colleges to violence and force--vulnerability both to force within and without. It has been made abundantly clear by the fire this morning that we are indeed vulnerable. We have had confidence in ourselves that we could order and control ourselves, and in some very large measure we still have that confidence despite the destruction of a building on our campus. We

do now recognize, however, our dependence upon the Town of Middlebury--that we arenot prepared or equipped to control the overt danger of fire, and we depend upon the dedicated volunteer firemen of our town to come to our shout for help.

We have a grave responsibility to protect human life and the College, and I have complete faith in our intent and our determination to do so. How we shall do so is the matter before us.

> "We who are engaged in the life of thought are likely to assume that the key to an understanding of the world is knowledge, both of the past and of the future--that if we had that knowledge we would also have wisdom. It is not my intention here to decry learning. It is only to say that we must come to understand that learning is endless and that nowhere does it lead us behind the existent world. It may reduce the prejudices of ignorance, set our bones, build our cities. In itself it will never make us ethical men. Yet because ours, we conceive, is an age of progress, and because we know more about time and history than any men before us, we fallaciously equate

> ethical advance with scientific progress in a point-to-point relationship. Thus as society improves physically, we assume the improvement of the individual, and are all the more horrified at those mass movements of terror which have so typified the first half of this century."
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> Loren Eiseley
> The Firmament of Time

We face the imperative of deciding how we shall proceed as a college in the face of this act of violence. We do so in the context, however, of an availability one to another unprecedented in my experience. What has happened in human understanding in two days is not diminished by this outrageous act; its worth takes on new power as a basis for one's trust in each other.

We have been in extraordinary session as a result of a College Council recommendation to suspend normal activities until Monday, 11 May, and this recommendation was ratified by the faculty in special session. We have been operating in good faith under the resolution of the faculty. Now it seems to me we must consider whether we should go on as we are or pursue another course.

There is the alternative of resuming normal activities through the College Council and the faculty

or the alternative of continuing to Monday under the provisions of our joint resolution.

As to the first, we cannot fail to consider that there is a real danger to the community in continuing in extraordinary session. The burning of Recitation Hall is concrete evidence of this danger; we simply cannot disregard it any more than we can disregard the fact of murder or blood on the hands. We can, however, seek to assess the fact of fire against the context of life at the College today. There is damage to us all, but the damage must not be allowed to impair the great human worth of the "coming together" which has moved us so profoundly. It may well be that the time has come for us to return to those regular patterns of life upon which we depend for our balance and stability; we may now need to bring our insights, our experience into the regular schedule of teaching and learning.

On the other hand, we have witnessed a great outpouring of good will, even when in strong disagreement, an openness all deeply felt, and this may be a basis for our carrying on in extraordinary session until Monday.

I want also to remind you that the resolution under which we now operate is one in which individual conscience is the determining principle. No one is coerced; each is free to follow the dictates of his own conscience in observing the occasion which precipitated this extra-ordinary state of the College.

Whatever be the recommendation of the College Council and the action of the faculty, as the President of the College I ask that you accept the decision. If I have not misread the prevailing spirit of our campus. I am sure I can depend upon you so to do.

Could I just have your attention now for two further matters.

One, to ask, again, of you that you recognize that what we are engaged in is a College decision. Each person has his own individual responsibility, as Fred Shepardson has indicated, in regard to his own course. But the College will make a decision and those of you who stay here, I ask that you accept the College decision.

Now if you would then permit me to read just one brief passage; and I'd like at the end of it if we could have about a minute of silence in contemplation, and then we'll adjourn.

> "Every relation to mankind, of hate or scorn or neglect, is full of vexation and torment. There is nothing to do with men but to love them...Task all the ingenuity of your mind to devise some other thing, but you can never find it. To hate your adversary will not help you; to kill him will not help you; nothing within the compass of the universe can help you, but to love him."
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> Orville Dewey
> 1794-1882